DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 134 392 RC 009 696

AUTHOR Zippert, John
TITLE The Minority Peoples Council on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway: A Citizen's Response to Rural Development and Industrialization.
PUB DATE 8 Feb 77
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Rural Sociology Section, Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists (Atlanta, Georgia, February 8, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affirmative Action; Community Education; *Economically Disadvantaged; Educational Programs; *Employment Opportunities; Industry; Low Income Groups; *Minority Groups; Negroes; *Organizations (Groups); *Rural Population; *Southern States; Surveys; Training; Vocational Development
IDENTIFIERS Alabama; Appalachia; Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway

ABSTRACT

The Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway (TTW), connecting the Port of Mobile, Alabama with Appalachia and mid-America, is the largest public works project now under construction in the U.S. Investigating the potential TTW impact on poor, rural, and black populations in the impact area, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives initiated a study in 1970 which revealed that about 60% of that population was low income, 40% black, and 75% of that black population low income. Other studies have revealed that between 1950-73 over 50 million people (66% black) have migrated out of the 165 county primary impact area, projecting that employment in the TTW area will increase by over 1 million jobs (1973-2000) without TTW and by 126,200 additional jobs with TTW. As a result of a conference convened in 1974 by the Federation, the Minority People's Council (MPC) on TTW was established. Forming a coalition with the construction craft unions, the MPC has engaged in: securing an affirmative action plan for minority employment in TTW construction; training programs to prepare minorities for employment; community education efforts to inform people of the TTW impact; involving educational institutions in the impact area; and conducting studies of available vocational program relevance to TTW employment opportunities. (JC)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

THE MINORITY PEOPLES COUNCIL ON THE TENNESSEE-TOMBIGBEE WATERWAY: A CITIZEN'S RESPONSE TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

By: John Zippert, Director
Tennessee-Tombigbee Research Team
Federation of Southern Cooperatives
Epes, Alabama

ED134392

Delivered at: Panel on Rural Vocational Education Needs Projection Through Citizens Participation, Rural Sociology Section, Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, Atlanta, Georgia, February 8, 1977

The Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway is the largest public works project now under construction in the United States. The federal and state governments are spending $1.6 billion, between 1970 and 1985, to construct the Waterway. The Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway (TTW) is a 253 mile ice-free inland barge canal connecting the Port of Mobile with the coal-fields of Appalachia and the grain fields of mid-America. Once completed in the 1980's, the Waterway will stimulate increased industrial, agricultural and recreational growth in southwest Alabama and northeast Mississippi, which heretofore have been economically depressed areas.

Over $300 million dollars in contracts have already been let along the entire distance of the Waterway. One thousand (1,000) construction workers are presently involved in the work, with the number projected to increase to as many as four thousand (4,000) at the peak of construction. Four of the ten locks and three of the five dams planned are already under construction. Development of the project is supervised by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, but control will eventually be vested in the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Development Authority (TTWDA), a five state compact whose directors are appointed by the governors of the States of Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Kentucky and Tennessee.

RC009696

For the past five years, I have lived and worked in Sumter and Greene Counties, Alabama, on the banks of the Tennessee-Tombigbee River close to the first TTW Lock and Dam site at Gainesville, Alabama. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, the organization I work with, established its Rural Training, Research, and Demonstration Farming Center in 1970 on 1,325 acres in close proximity to the Tombigbee River.

In the early 1970's as part of our concern for rural development, a group of us in the Federation began studying the implications of the

Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway to indigenous people in the impact area. We discovered some facts and trends which formed the basis and premises of our efforts to organize local, poor and Black people to work toward receiving a fair and proportionate share of all benefits of this massive, infrastructural development. Some of these trends were:

1. Our study of U. S. Census and other demographic data showed that approximately sixty percent (60%) of the population in the sixteen (16) county immediate impact area (counties directly touching the Waterway) were low-income, (incomes at or below 125% of poverty standards) and forty percent (40%) were Black people. Of the Black people in the impact area, seventy-five percent (75%) were low-income by census definitions. (Note 1) These percentage figures of the poor and Black composition of the TTW impact area population remain relatively constant as the impact area is expanded to include the 165 counties in the "tributary impact area of the TTW" recognized by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers as the primary impact area of the Waterway in southeast Alabama, northwest Mississippi, east Tennessee and western Kentucky.

2. A recent study supported by the Appalachian Regional Commission shows that in the period 1950 - 1973, over half a million persons (two-thirds Black people) migrated out of the 165 county primary impact area (Note 2) because insufficient employment opportunities were available. The same study projects, due to increasing industrial and manufacturing development in the southeast, that in the coming period for the years 1973 - 2000, employment in the TTW impact area will increase by over one million jobs (Note 3) and population by nearly two million (Note 4), <u>this is in the absence of the impact of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway.</u>

   When the TTW Project is included in the projections, an additional 126,200 jobs will be created between 1973 - 2000. Of these 29,000 will be added during the construction phase to 1985 and, an additional 97,200 in the ensuing development period (Note 5). This is a 15% increase in employment growth above projected "normal" growth trends for the area. The population of the area is expected to grow by a quarter of a million as a direct result of the Waterway (Note 6).

   Our concern in reviewing these population and employment trends was to question what impact would the Waterway have on the indigenous rural, poor and Black population of the impact area. Would these persons receive the benefits of the Waterway, or will we continue to be encouraged to migrate away from the area, while other more highly educated and trained persons from other parts of the nation are imported into the area?

   These concerns are also important when we consider that a major rational offered by the Corps of Engineers for funding the TTW are its "redevelopment benefits" in helping to reduce unemployment and poverty in the areas traversed by the Waterway. Will these redevelopment benefits go to indigenous residents of the area in need of them or will we be passed over once again in the name of efficiency and progress...

3. Our concern with these questions was intensified when we studied recent patterns of economic and employment growth in the southeastern states. A study of economic growth by the University of Alabama, illustrates a disturbing trend that has occurred across the South: "Almost half of the Alabama's manufacturing growth between 1969 and 1972 has taken place in rural white counties with less than 30% Black population. Of the State's 3,345 new manufacturing plants expansions, 1,524 have been located in the predominantly rural white counties. These facilities created 84,000 of 176,000 new manufacturing jobs in the State and gave the rural-white counties a significantly stronger economic base. While in the rural-Black counties, those having a majority Black population, the small gains in manufacturing employment were not even large enough to offset the decline in agricultural employment, much less to sustain the job needs of new entrants into the labor force. This pattern of industrial development favoring the rural counties with low Black population repeats itself across the south." (Note 7)

   In a recent pamphlet issued by the environmentalist groups opposing the Waterway, they make the telling point that, "If waterways are effective in inducing economic growth, why is Greene County Alabama, which has the channelized Black Warrior River on its western boundary and the Tombigbee River on its eastern boundary, still the fifth poorest county in America..." (Note 8) What is not stated is that Greene County has a majority Black population and since 1969 has had Black control of county government. Thus the racist patterns inherent in economic development decisions in the accelerating industrialization of the southeast are important factors in assessing the potential benefits of the TTW to indigenous poor and Black people in the impact area.

4. Another disturbing trend is that there is a pre-occupation with the physical planning and development of the Waterway, i.e., construction contracts, port development, sewage disposal systems, etc., without a concomitant concern or commitment to the human resource planning and development needed to insure the full involvement of local people in the Waterway impact area. Despite a decade of lead-time, there do not seem to be many efforts to insure that vocational education, higher education, health facilities, housing and other human resource planning takes into account the growth to be induced by the Waterway.

   Many of the planning and development boards - e.g., Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Development Authority, Tombigbee River Valley Water Management District, Port of Mobile Commission, with jurisdiction for the Waterway do not have any Black participation or involvement, thus the viewpoint of those concerned with human resource planning, training and development is not heard in the official planning and policy councils.

5. When we at the Federation looked into the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, we realized it is only one of many major infrastructural projects developing in the rural South which will lead to further industrialization and hasten the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society from many indigenous people. Among similar projects are: the

Savannah River Project on South Carolina/Georgia border; the Red River Project on the Louisiana/Arkansas border, nuclear power generating plants, highway projects and others. We also realized any experience we gained in dealing with the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project could be studied and replicated by groups in other areas.

From our experience, in the Federation of Southern Cooperatives and the civil rights movement, we felt it was important to form a constituency based organization of people indigenous to the Waterway area, to raise important questions about the implications of the TTW. We needed a large strong membership organization capable of exerting political pressure; lobbying locally, regionally and nationally; demonstrating in the streets if necessary; and that was also backed up with sophisticated research, legal and technical assistance capabilities. We felt the organization should be able to both influence public policies and to create "alternative models", where this was necessary to illustrate sound policy and programmatic alternatives. We also knew the organization would require a comprehensive program because the Waterway itself was a complex and comprehensive undertaking - so similarly the community response would need to be comprehensive in scope and farsighted in perspective.

In January 1974, the Federation and its state associations in Alabama and Mississippi convened the "First Peoples Conference on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway." An outgrowth of this conference was the establishment of the Minority Peoples Council on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway (MPC). The MPC is a coalition of people, organizations, elected officials and others organized to insure that Black and poor people are fully involved and receive a fair share of all benefits of the Waterway during construction and in the subsequent development phase. The Minority Peoples Council has established objectives in ten areas of interest to people in the impact area, i.e., fair employment, economic development, participation on decision making boards, land ownership, involvement of educational institutions, housing, health care, research, legal challenges and community education.

Membership in the MPC costs $2.00 per year to cover the cost of newsletter mailings and other services. Members join local county chapters. Each chapter is entitled to two representatives for the first fifty members and one additional representative for each additional fifty members to the central Minority Peoples Council governing body which meets monthly in the Waterway area. During 1976, over 1,500 paid memberships were recorded and the newsletter was sent to over 2,500 people. From this group, the officers and executive board is chosen. At large members of the Council, who are generally persons residing outside the impact area with a concern for the TTW, are nominated by the executive board and approved by the membership at annual conference. The local county chapter meets regularly and works out local problems as well as furthering the overall region-wide goals and program of the MPC. We have attempted to maintain a fluid broad based coalition of people in the Waterway area to further the goals of the Minority Peoples Council.

In terms of citizens involvement in educational issues relative to the TTW, our efforts have been concentrated on: securing an affirmative action

to insure employment of minorities in construction of the Waterway, training programs to prepare minorities for employment opportunities, community education efforts to inform people of the impact of the Waterway, involvement of educational institutions in the impact area, and preliminary studies of the relevance and compatability of available vocational education programs to the employment opportunities to be created by the TTW.

In 1974, the MPC formed a coalition with the construction craft unions involved in building the Waterway (National Joint Heavy and Highway Construction Committee, including operating engineers, carpenters, laborers, cement finishers and teamsters), the National Rural Center, the Recruitment and Training Program (RTP, a DOL sponsored program to recruit and place minority workers in the construction industry) and others. This group formulated an "areawide affirmative action plan" calling for 40% minority employment in all crafts on all projects in construction of the Waterway. This plan was to form the basis for an orderly training process to prepare and employ thousands of indigenous people on the TTW. While the unions and the community, as represented by the MPC, were willing to enter this agreement on a voluntary basis, the contractors and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers opposed the agreement and refused to cooperate.

This led to months of lobbying, letterwriting and a threat of litigation, then after three years of struggle to get an equitable affirmative action plan for the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway's construction, in 1976, we won a partial victory. On August 12, 1976, the Office of Federal Contracts Compliance imposed "special bid conditions" on all future contracts on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. These conditions apply on an "areawide basis" to thirty Alabama and Mississippi counties in the impact area. The percentage goal of minority hiring increases in stages from 19% in 1976 to 30% in 1980. Adjustments can be made periodically to change the goals as the availability of minority male and female construction workers in the area increases. The counties included are: in Alabama - Choctaw, Sumter, Greene, Hale, Perry, Marengo, Tuscaloosa, Pickens, Lamar, Fayette, Marion, Franklin and Colbert; in Mississippi - Lauderdale, Kemper, Winston, Noxubee, Oktibbeha, Lowndes, Clay, Chickasaw, Monroe, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, Union, Prentiss, Tishomingo, Alcorn and Tippah.

While this plan does not reach our objective of insuring 40% minority involvement in the TTW, it is a beginning point that indicates the effectiveness of the Minority Peoples Council in placing pressure on the government to achieve fair employment standards for this major project. The "areawide" scope of the plan enhances its effectiveness in reaching people throughout the impact area. The OFCC regulations under which the special bid conditions were established, apply to all Federal construction projects in non-SMSA areas, i.e., rural areas, which means that our efforts to develop an equitable hiring plan for the TTW Project will also benefit rural groups around the nation confronted with similar problems.

Most of these trainees were placed in construction jobs in the TTW area. The MPC also took a position in support of high pre-determined wage rates for construction work on the TTW, when local Mississippi officials attempted to secure lower rates than paid for the same work in Alabama. We felt that

we should fight for decent wages so that when we finally were successful in placing minority workers, they would benefit financially from these positions.

We are also contacting the major new employers, e.g., Weyerheauser Corporation, Consoldidated Coal, Parsons and Whittemore, Alabama Electric Cooperatives, Mississippi Chemical Company, and others who are coming into the area to locate on or near the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway and its tributary river systems, concerning their equal opportunity and training policies. We are encouraging them and existing industries to develop programs that will fully involve and train indigenous low-income people. One of our programmatic goals for 1977 is the establishment of an advisory committee to MPC of industry representatives to assist us with training program development, minority business enterprise and other areas.

In addition to these major steps, the MPC has been engaged in a variety of other activities related to citizens involvement in educational issues relative to the TTW. These activities include:

* A preliminary study of the offerings and enrollments at vocational schools and technical colleges in the TTW impact area which shows little compatability with the coming needs for industrial skills; very few of the programs train - millwrights, industrial mechanics and electricians, pipe fitters, tool and die makers, machine shop workers, agri-business managers, etc. All of which will be in demand by Waterway related industries.

* MPC representatives are actively participating in state meetings relative to the five year vocational education plans, required under the new Vocational Education Act Amendment of 1976, to insure that plans relevant to the involvement of indigenous people in the TTW are formulated.

* MPC is planning a conference in mid-spring in cooperation with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to acquaint community leaders with the provisions for citizens participation in the Vocational Education Act of 1976.

* MPC is contacting CETA agencies and programs in the affected states, to encourage them to develop compatible programs with the construction and development of TTW.

* The MPC Legal Committee plans to intervene in law suits filed by the environmentalists opposed to the Waterway, to assert and protect the interests of minority and poor people in the TTW area.

* As a longer range prescription the MPC is proposing legislation to Congress to create the "TTW Minority Oversight and Resource Center" funded by an annual appropriation equal to three percent (3%) of the allocations for

construction of the Waterway. Our proposal is based on the precedent of a similar provision in the Railroad Revitalization and Reorganization Act of 1975. The center would be able to monitor and actively promote minority involvement in all aspects of the Waterway development.

In an ideal sense, if the Tombigbee Waterway is to realize its potential and promises to low-income and minority indigenous people, there are several steps that must be taken now, while there is still time. There must be immediate priority given to human resource development planning, training and programming on an equal footing with the physical planning for TTW.

This human resource concern would be manifest in:

a. establishment and funding of the "TTW Minority Oversight and Resource Center" to vigorously pursue and advocate a program for full involvement of indigenous poor and minority people in the project;

b. that the "TTW Oversight and Resource Center" together with government, universities, the Employment Service, CETA and other concerned agencies, develop a "skills and training inventory" of all persons living in the TTW area interested in sharing in the opportunities to be created. This data bank can then be used in matching persons to training and employment opportunities;

c. insure that all vocational education plans are evaluated and made relevant and compatible with the TTW development; and develop new programs as needed to train and prepare local people for employment in the TTW impact area;

d. assist minority economic and enterprise development programs to assure minority people and community groups with land, ideas and other resources, have an opportunity to capitalize on the TTW's natural resource development of the area.

For more information on our activities, you may write to:

Minority Peoples Council on
The Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway
Post Office Box 5
Gainesville, Alabama 35464
Phone: 205/652-9676

NOTES

1. U.S. Census, "1970 Population" and "1970 Economic and Social Characteristics" for the State of Alabama and Mississippi

2. Hamer, Siler, George Associates, "Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, Impact Study - Executive Summary", Washington, D.C. March 31, 1976, page 7

3. Ibid, p.20

4. Ibid, p.23

5. Ibid, p.28

6. Ibid, p.31

7. Thompson, Arthur A., "The Five Economics of Alabama: Patterns of Urban-Rural Development" Graduate School of Business, University of Alabama, 1974

8. CLEAN, "Stop the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway" pamphlet, Starkville, Mississippi, December, 1976.